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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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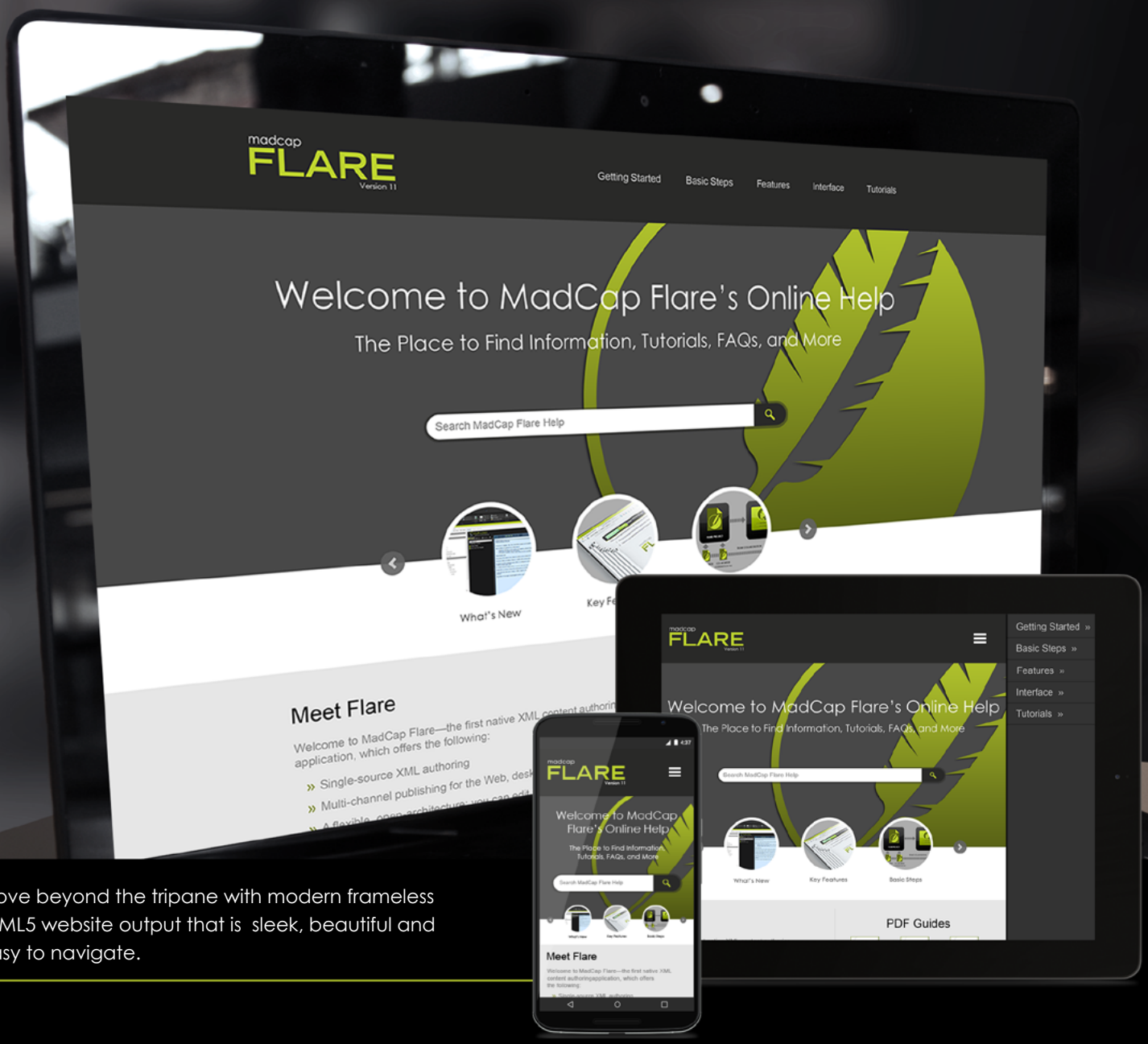

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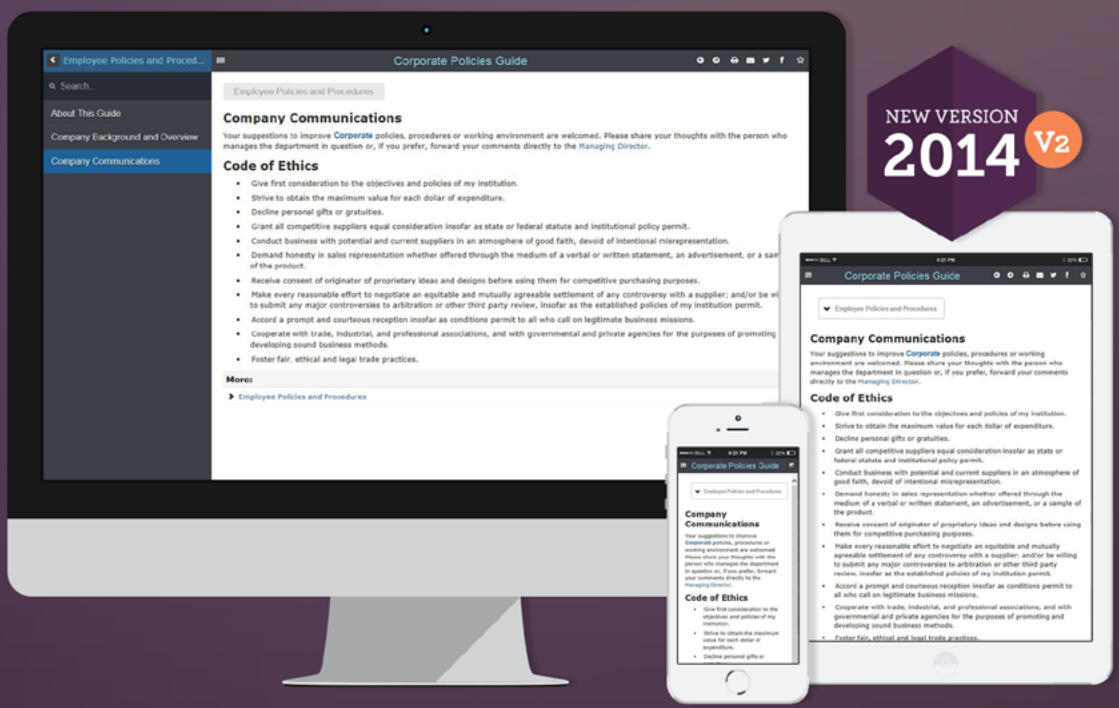

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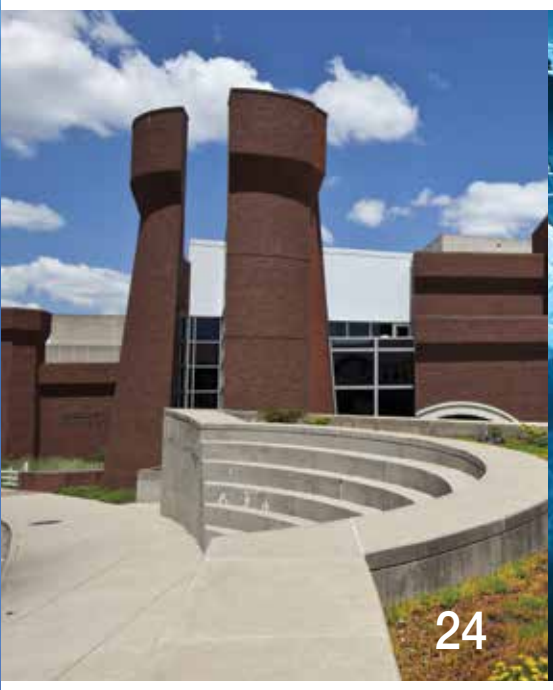

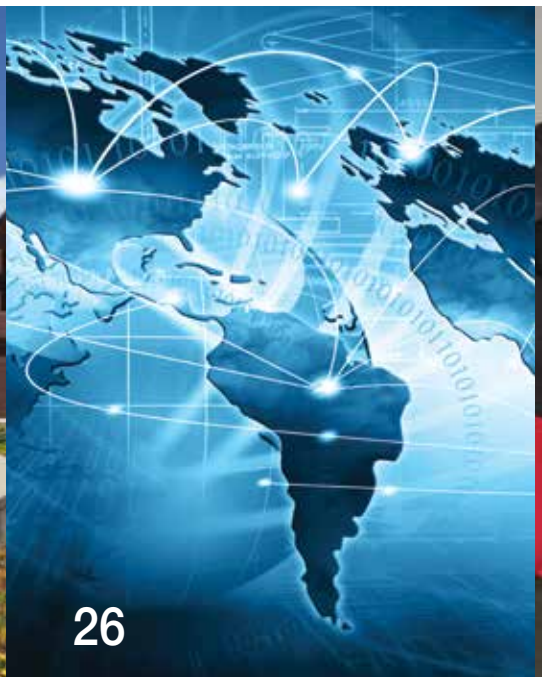

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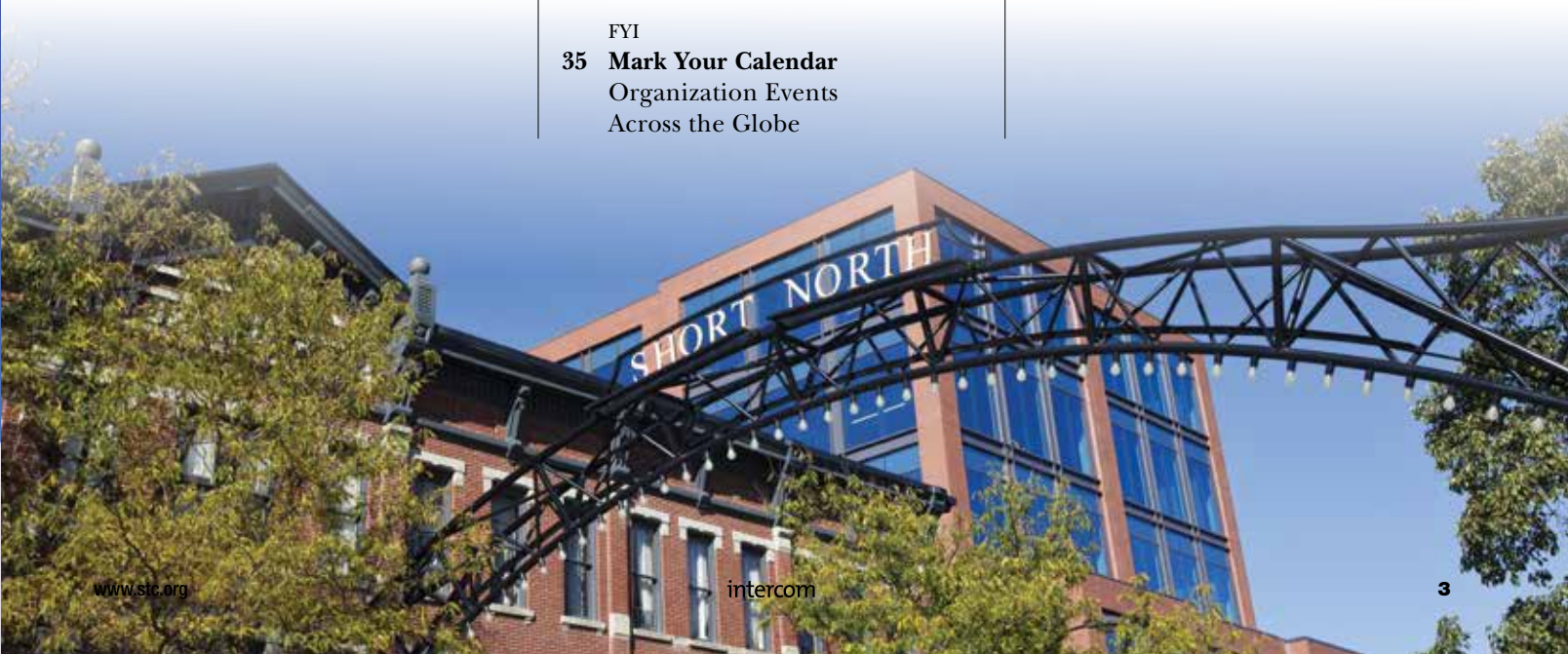

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A Note from the Editor

A COMMON THEME in this issue on megatrends in technical communication is the human factor. In three articles on disruptive technologies—the Internet of Things, Big Data, and machine translation—the authors have each shown how human effort is a required factor in interaction with these technological solutions, in such roles as user advocates, data interpreters, and translation experts.

Although there has always been a certain level of distrust associated with disruptive technologies, the authors in this issue argue that tech solutions should be embraced by technical communicators because of the new opportunities and career growth they produce, along with an increased emphasis on tools to help research and the work in the field. For example, in their article on Big Data, Michael Salvo and Adam Strantz argue for the "humanization of technology" and that technical communication's role in Big Data must be the role we have played with other disruptive events—"representing people and their needs." In "We Are All Things in the Internet of Things," Ray Gallon defines the concept of the Internet of Things (IoT) and explains that, in a content economy, people are required to not only interpret Big Data, but also to communicate the analysis to stakeholders. And in his article on megatrend machine translation, Alan Houser emphasizes that issues with machine translation quality are being resolved with the addition of human translators in the process, which meets a global demand for localized content.

This issue also marks the launch of a new column on globalization, "Working Locally, Communicating Globally," by Kirk St.Amant. In the column, he defines the REACH approach to developing online materials for international audiences. In "Meet the Change Agents," Scott Abel interviews Philip Wisniewski on content engineering—"a discipline of applying an engineering lens to content and a content lens to engineering." And Ferry Vermeulen reviews a new release of Flare, with detailed features, including frameless website output for HTML5, Doc-to-Help import, absolute positioning, and much more.

STC also published its annual Year in Review this month. To learn about the state of your professional association, read more on page 24. And two articles on the annual Summit in Columbus, Ohio, remind us that it's time to register for the premier technical communication conference! Hope to see you there!

—Liz Pohland
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We Are All Things in the Internet of Things

By RAY GALLON | *Senior Member*

"When wireless is perfectly applied, the whole earth will be converted into a huge brain, which in fact it is, all things being particles of a real and rhythmic whole…. And the instruments through which we shall be able to do this will be amazingly simple compared with our present telephone. A man will be able to carry one in his vest pocket."

—Nikola Tesla, interviewed in *Colliers Magazine*, 30 January 1926, by John B. Kennedy

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THE IDEA IS SO SIMPLE—everything is connected to everything. The implications are enormous. A totally interconnected system opens multiple infinities of possible communications paths. It operates at levels of complexity that not only boggle the individual mind, they surpass even the ability of groups of knowledgeable people to comprehend the ramifications. Yet the world's most forward-looking companies are already investing heavily in a technology that is no longer a future vision, it's a reality, and spreading at lightning speeds.

9 59
Your telephone just called us. Are you feeling ill? Press #1 and we will call an ambulance for you.
Your insurance premium has increased by 20%

When Kevin Ashton used the term *Internet of Things* for the first time in 1999, he put the accent on giving each object a unique identity using RFID technology, to save time and reduce waste by taking the responsibility of entering data and gathering information away from humans. According to Ashton, objects that talk to each other would do so faster and safer, and would contact data centers via wireless communications to optimize processes.

Today's idea of the Internet of Things (IoT) extends well beyond "faster and safer," and includes notions of artificial intelligence and machine autonomy.

We Are All "Things" in the Internet of Things

The following characteristics are generally defined as necessary for the Internet of Things to function:

- Objects are uniquely identifiable (via technologies like RFID)
- They can be virtually represented in an Internet-like structure
- They are open, with common protocols connecting them
- Information about them is available worldwide: location, tracking, context, global tendencies, user profiles, etc.
- Interaction between objects can be automated, via machine-to-machine (M2M) networks

A "thing" in the IoT can include living beings, as in this explanation by Ivy Wigmore, a contributor to the information site *whatis.com*:

> "A thing, in the Internet of Things, can be a person with a heart monitor implant, a farm animal with a biochip transponder, an automobile that has built-in sensors to alert the driver when tire pressure is low—or any other natural or man-made object that can be assigned an IP address and provided with the ability to transfer data over a network."

These things can also be equipped with their own processors and with decision-making capabilities.

It is becoming obvious that, although most of our understanding of the use of technology by human beings has been a voluntary and conscious activity, today we are entering a scenario where we are less and less conscious of actions and decisions taken by technological objects without human intervention. As Max Weiser of Xerox PARC says, "The most profound technologies are those that disappear."

Smart Houses

The most common example (and the most banal) of the IoT is the idea of a smart house, where, for example, your windows open and close, and your shades and shutters adjust according to the angle of the sun, the temperature, and the parameters of comfort you've given to the equipment. But also, those same windows call the police and your insurance company because one has been broken, and the system lets you know about it at the same time.

Your smart house is equipped with a smart refrigerator. You buy an IoGurt (Internet of Yogurt) that is identified individually with a particular code. It has a nanochip that can be tracked by your smartphone. As you walk in the door with it, sensors in the doorframe immediately check the phone and send the information to the Smart fridge. The refrigerator, in turn, tells you if the yogurt is spoiled, either because the "best by" date has passed, or as a result of chemical analysis once you've put the yogurt into the refrigerator. Either the refrigerator sends you a text message that you need to take the yogurt back, or it just connects to the supermarket to order more and process the credit, and it is the supermarket that tells you you're going to have more yogurt delivered by the afternoon.

A New Kind of Big Data

But smart houses are a tiny dot on the IoT landscape. According to Matt Asay, 90 percent of the world's data was generated in the last two years alone, much of it by machines. Part of the goal of IoT developers is to create value by making sense of that data. And there's a lot of value to be created. Cisco's analysts (Joseph Bradely et al.) have provided these estimates of what's at stake in different IoT applications:

- Smart factories: $1.95 trillion
- Connected marketing and advertising: $1.95 trillion
- Smart [electrical] grid: $757 billion
- Connected gaming and entertainment: $635 billion
- Smart buildings: $349 billion
- Connected commercial ground vehicles: $347 billion
- Connected healthcare and patient monitoring: $106 billion

According to Bill Ruh, vice president and global technology director at General Electric, the future of the Internet is industrial—not surprising given the areas where General Electric is active. Ruh says that it's "about building new software and analytics that can extract and make sense of data where it never existed before—such as within machines."

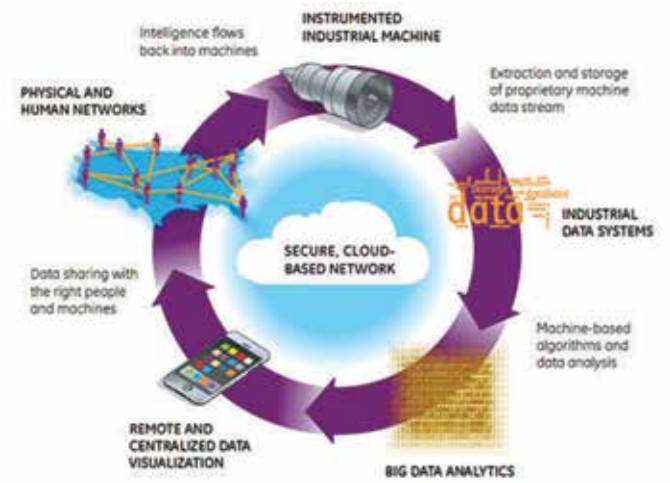
INSTRUMENTED INDUSTRIAL MACHINE
Intelligence flows back into machines
Extraction and storage of proprietary machine data stream
PHYSICAL AND HUMAN NETWORKS
INDUSTRIAL DATA SYSTEMS
SECURE, CLOUD-BASED NETWORK
Data sharing with the right people and machines
Machine-based algorithms and data analysis
REMOTE AND CENTRALIZED DATA VISUALIZATION
BIG DATA ANALYTICS

Figure 1: General Electric's Industrial Internet

By integrating sensor-based data into networks and the Internet, we are not only connecting thousands of objects that will be able to exchange information on their own. We are, in fact, creating a whole layer of virtual knowledge based of what these objects can identify, reproduce, or interpret from the real world, through millions of open channels, sensors, and devices that are getting smaller, smarter, and cheaper.

Big Data in this virtual knowledge layer will become the new currency of a content economy, and it raises a number of important questions:

- Will this information be available to anyone capable of accessing it, or only to the ones who can pay for it?
- What if nobody can access it at all, except the network itself, or the final corporate owner of the network?
- What if we install microsensors and devices somewhere, and nobody remembers that it was done, so that the next generations end up being monitored without ever knowing?
- Will governments, corporations, or insurance companies impose implants on us to control health-care costs?
- Will these implants be a right or an obligation?
- What if a connected medical implant gets hacked?
- Do we get to see, and correct, data collected about us? Will we want to?
- Do we have any idea how to educate our kids, or even ourselves, for this future?

Where Are Technical Communicators in this Brave New World?

The first thing one might think is that with machines talking directly to one another, there's no need to explain anything. But even on the most primary level, all these machines need to be told what to communicate to each other, what to do when certain conditions are met, and whom to notify. The content economy that the IoT produces will certainly require people with the ability not only to analyze Big Data, but to communicate the analysis to executives, governments, and other society leaders, as well as to the general public. Technical communicators will see their roles expand, as they become interpreters of data or work with interpreters of data to communicate what it all means.

Technical communicators will take on some of the traditional roles of journalists, science writers, Web content developers, etc. But we will also be working together with developers and interaction designers to create useful, informative control interfaces for programming and configuring the myriad IoT devices that will populate our world: everything from an intelligent toaster to an electrical generator that knows to shut itself down gracefully before a main bearing ruptures and causes major damage.

Journalist Matt Asay assures us that "The real money in IoT is not in the 'things,' but rather in the Internet-enabled services that stitch them together." The big challenge is not only to monitor all the data, but also to create relationships between different data related to the same entity. We can even modify different associated things that interact in a given space. The Internet of Things will be able to create human microclimates, social gathering spaces, or special labor market conditions. And technical communicators will be there showing people how to make sense of it all, and answering those difficult questions—to use the services and data available to us to improve our lives.

A communicator for over 40 years, RAY GALLON *is a cofounder and principal researcher in The Transformation Society research group in Barcelona, Spain, and the owner of Culturecom, a consultantancy specialized in business process improvement through communication. He has over 20 years' experience in the technical content industries, including major companies such as IBM, Alcatel, and General Electric Health Care. He is a member of the STC international board of directors, and past president of STC France.*

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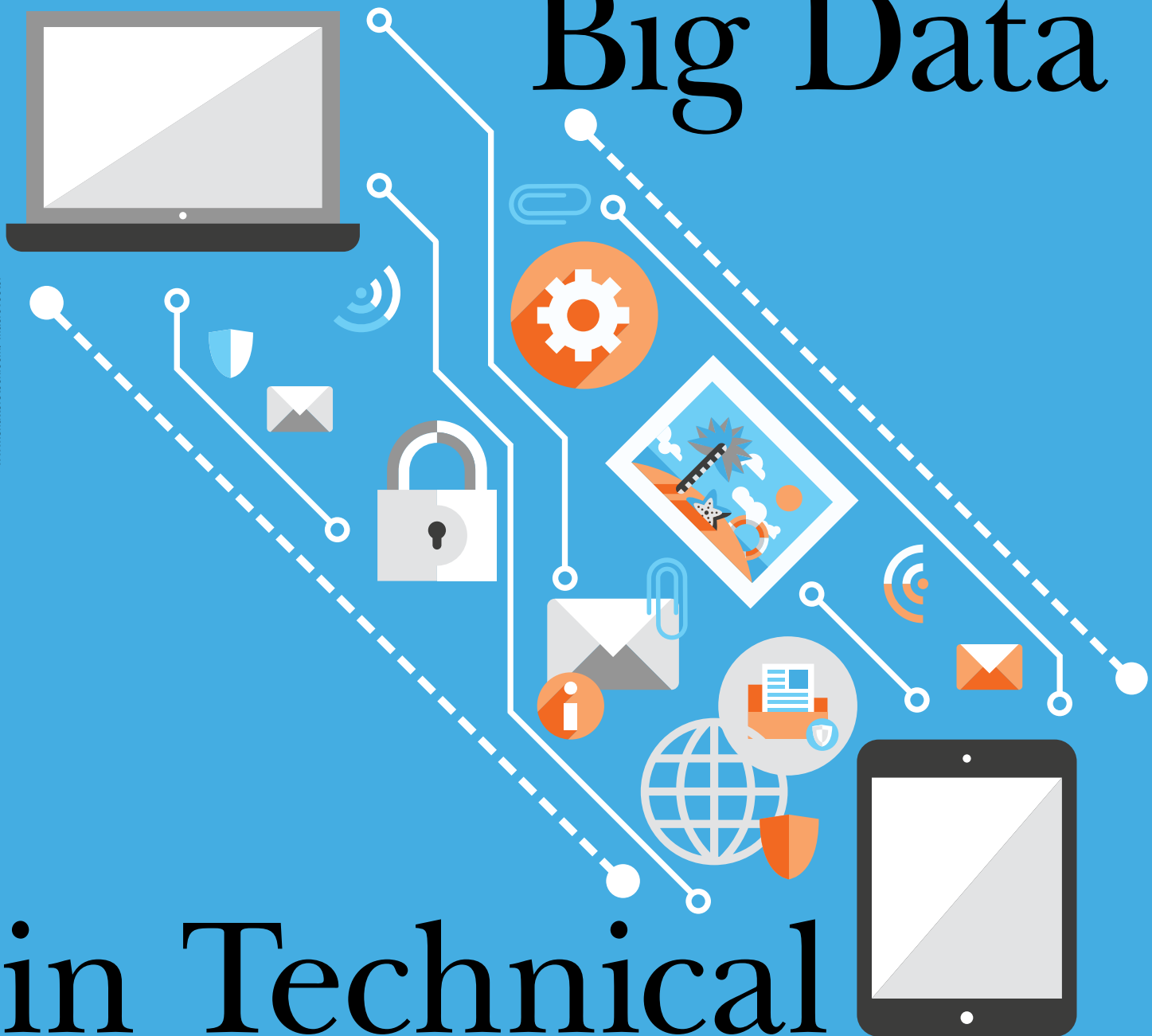
Wayfinding Big Data in Technical Communication



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By MICHAEL SALVO AND ADAM STRANTZ

WHENEVER WE READ or hear the phrase "Big Data," we have two simultaneous competing thoughts. The first is a bit cynical, and we cannot help but riffle though the half dozen buzzwords and trends, more or less related, which have fallen short of predictions for disrupting patterns of work. The second is more egocentric. Technical communicators want to know what Big Data can do *for us*. After all, we each produce the raw materials, the bits of data that become terabytes and exabytes—the bits and bytes that, together in aggregate, really make up Big Data.

We won't claim that people *are* Big Data, but we are certainly its cause and its source. IBM states that 90% of all data that exists has been produced in the past two years (IBM Big Data Success Stories, *ftp://ftp.software.ibm.com/software/data/sw-library/big-data/ibm-big-data-success.pdf*). It seems a ludicrous claim until one narrows the definition of data to match: IBM is talking about *digital* data. In addition, all the data that we think of as disposable—search engine queries, GPS directions, Web reading histories—is not only recorded but also duplicated and stored. It becomes warehoused data. Once-disposable digital data does not seem professionally compelling to a technical communicator. But if there were ways to access user-centered analysis data, designed to show us things we care about in the data—things that might improve our lives—well then, that is an entirely different thing. What individuals might find compelling are Big Data services that respect our roles as contributors to the oceans of data by delivering significant results.

As more people generate content through such platforms as social media, mobile devices, and personalized applications, our digital leavings coalesce into substantial amounts of personalized data. While companies collect much of this data, mostly behind the scenes, much is simply left floating amid the flotsam generated online—a signal lost amid a sea of digital noise. Beyond the number of individuals we are connected to online, the amount of information generated by and available to our devices is virtually endless—it is this network of individuals and information that forms the backdrop to Big Data research practices. Being able to study our own digital histories, then, allows us to contextualize our data within the networked structures that create opportunities for digital work.

The pervasiveness of mobile technologies and social media sites highlight the always-on, always-networked nature of the individual writer and researcher. As technologies embed themselves into the ways we interact with, see, and approach our work, new technologies encourage behavioral changes that play out through users. Futurists used to dream of an embedded chip jacking our brains directly into the network, but it turns out it's easier to just have our connection in our pockets. Current technology can be represented as equally invasive as those nightmarish neural sensors, but the challenge remains in making the significance of data streams clear, making our data traces visible to users, and enabling them to interact meaningfully with data of our own making. A forward-thinking view of the technical communicator's place in this discussion would align with previous efforts to make technology available to users—whether in supporting mundane activities, reproducing the microcomputer revolution with data analysis, or identifying roles for users in utilizing technology, generating data, and accessing that data with a purpose.

Being able to study our own digital histories … allows us to contextualize our data within the networked structures that create opportunities for digital work.

The key to making sense of these messy, complex amounts of data (see Graham et al.) is the ability to meaningfully interact with the accrued data. Amid distopian concerns for nefarious uses of hidden data collected by social media sites, the potential benefits of the growing amount of publicly available data require scrutiny as well. For instance, groups on social media like Facebook are creating digital traces that are unretrievable—unusable. That history, and the tangles that form institutions, professional groups, and social circles, are visible as endlessly scrolling lists, but are unsearchable—they have no memories. While everything seems to be available, nothing is truly *accessible*. And so, once again, disruptive technology presents opportunities to create user-centered interfaces. Big Data requires tools to allow users to manipulate and investigate that data. This is what the field is currently calling "wayfinding"—we need to help users confidently find their way through the landscapes generated by this data. Whether by designing interfaces that aid users in exploring their own data or by signposting and organizing data in ways others can follow, these navigational metaphors support users tracing their own digital paths. In this way, we can better create user-focused tools that invite, rather than repel, interaction and present navigation as integral aspects of not just studying but living with Big Data.

Whether provided by the sites themselves or developed through third-party use of application programming interfaces (APIs), these tools offer ways to manage the data we generate in our digital lives. Some tools can be used to investigate our own patterns as we work. For example, users with Android phones are by default opted-in to Google Maps tracking, recording their movements with Google. While the data can be represented as a breach of privacy, the ability for users to access maps opens possibilities for reflection by putting information and tools in users' hands. The trade-off between tracking motion through space and reflecting on one's own data is key to contextualizing the impact of these technologies—if algorithms adapt and learn from our behavior, so can we. But we need to translate the data into interfaces that make sense to users and can be put to work in real time, available at the moment of decision-making.

Open source tools and APIs for sites such as Facebook and Twitter offer further opportunities for users to interact with data collected from personal and public online sources. While this data is usually freely accessible on the sites themselves, social media (and the vast amounts of data generated) open opportunities for developers to offer analytic tools to support users' investigations of themselves, which leads to seeing themselves in relationship to communities in which they participate, reflecting both global popular and niche/local trends.

Aside from the tools available for tracing individuals, analytic tools are increasingly focused on collecting and visualizing the interactions happening between users. Reddit Insight, an analytic tool for the popular link-sharing website Reddit, can visualize trends and aggregate views and posts by a single user or a community. Everything from a single user's most popular post to the ranking of a community (or subreddit) against the most popular communities on Reddit can be tracked. Similarly, Twitter analytics allow a user or group account to visualize their posts over time as well as member engagement: conversations, retweets, favorites, even the number of people who clicked on shared links are compiled into a quick snapshot. Analytics take these vague questions of what our work is doing, or if it's having any effect, and attempts to quantify an answer. Can we prove effectiveness or impact? Maybe not, but taken together these analytic tools offer a way to view user data as something more: Big Data. Or networked data that exists not in a vacuum, but in the interactions between communities and their competing digital signatures.

While it may be gratifying to view our own social media, the ability to monitor the reach of participation (see Verzosa Hurley & Kimme Hea) and connections helps to contextualize the internetworked nature of participation of these digital spaces. Not only do online communities of users generate huge amounts of data (oftentimes thousands of comments and pageviews), but these spaces also exist in conversation with other entities, producing a stream of individual data points as well as larger data trends tracing community interaction. Concepts such as the reach of a post, popularity (through likes, upvotes, favorites), and visibility in the network have become important information for tracking online communities. Number of views doesn't cut it anymore, and the complexity of these social media sites and the content their users generate becomes apparent once this interconnectedness is made visible. Instead of guessing at the impact of an individual's work in these spaces, emerging analytic tools can provide a way to articulate data and visualize the conversations happening in the network. While Liza Potts's *Social Media in Disaster Response* (2014) gestures toward a plastic future of useful, flexible tools that allow users to shape their digital media experience in real time, Twitter searches are but the first step in creating an interface for analysis.

There is a rather hopeless, perennial post demanding that Facebook users get paid for their participation, their contributions, to the Zuckerberg ocean of data. How Facebook makes money off that body of data, floats flotillas of businesses. We would have monetized our expertise long ago if we had insight into how all that works. Any kind of literal payment just seems improbable if not simply naive. Instead, what we envision is increased access both to the findings and the analytical tools developed to sort through the data. We want user-centered interfaces that present results of Big Data we can use to improve our lives—a signal amid all the noise. Bill Hart-Davidson and Jeffrey Grabill articulate the discussion as one of *ambient* data rather than Big Data, and Hart-Davidson's recent work looks at individual health data—fitbits and quantifiable health data people are collecting about their own exercise and diets—and makes larger data streams individually significant. Similarly, the Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) announcement of the Faciloscope app makes huge data sets individually accessible and coherent. It makes discrete parts of the larger data stream intelligible (*www.cal.msu.edu/faciloscope*).

While businesses wring efficiencies and articulate new markets through analysis of terabytes of untapped data, technical communicators can participate. Big Data presents opportunities consistent with our core competencies and traditions of work rather than renegotiating what it is we do. Ultimately, the inquiry becomes something other than suggesting that technical communicators become data scientists. We didn't become engineers, scientists, or programmers in response to earlier opportunities. While becoming technologically literate and relevant, we resisted being driven by the technology. Instead, our strength and value continues in the humanization of technology. The passing age of personal computing opened so many opportunities for technical communicators and the field of technical communication to participate in the development and documentation of the hardware and software of desktop computing, and then the design and deployment of the Internet, and its redevelopment into a participatory medium in Web 2.0 (one of the buzzwords now thankfully fading in frequency of use). Usability, user-advocacy, interface design, and visualization: these competencies repeatedly are underdeveloped and undervalued, but they are vitally important to bringing value to Big Data, as they have proven to be in the wake of each so-called disruptive technology.

As a field, our aim should be to develop usable applications and meaningful artifacts out of the data with a human-accessible face. That is, technical communication's role in Big Data can and must continue to be the role we have played in data mining, knowledge and information management, and all the previous constructions of similar realms of application: representing people and their needs, as well as participating in the emergence of useful and usable artifacts.

In October 2014, Brent Faber offered a powerful workshop at the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on the Design of Communication (ACM SIGDOC) focused on Big Data. The lab Faber runs at Worcester Polytechnic Institute has produced a stunning list of early successes. While the room was full of interested, smart people reflecting on the workshop and discussion (there was over 200 years of experience in technical, professional, and digital communication and usability in the room), it became clear that Big Data and Ambient Data are not yet yielding visible results for people in their everyday lives.

At the moment, Big Data is most useful to data scientists, most valuable to large organizations, utilized for huge business gains in the global economy, and best approached by specialists. See especially IBM's business cases and consultancy website(s) (see References below) which describes opportunities for individuals but benefits for businesses. There are many sites offering Big Data analysis tools, and sites tout the advantages for businesses as well as the opportunities available to specialists who can articulate such findings. Like computing before the personal computing revolution, there seems little opportunity for individual level access to the fruits of Big Data analysis. What's in it for us—and by *us*, we mean the individual, the person, rather than the multinational organization making money out of once-disposable terabytes?

We are in the UNIVAC age of Big Data: like computing in the 1940s through the 1960s, there was potential and specialists were making business cases and early gains by articulating their programming, hardware, and computational skills. But there was dubious value offered to the public, and little, if any, to individual users. It was a true "trickle-down" ideology—life, we were promised, would get (vaguely) better through digital computing. Or perhaps we are moving into the hobbyist stage of the 1970s and 1980s, as fitbits and personal health data are the first realizations of a coming wave of products and services utilizing Ambient Data.

Big Data remains specialized, obfuscated, and elite. There is not yet a clear way forward. There is lots of potential evident in technology and analytic methods, but no clear, direct benefit for end-users. Even the term end-user is a purposely chosen, historically situated term: while dated, it brings back an earlier age of concern for and design for an audience. A user-centered revolution in Big Data is necessary. The user experience of data is in need of redesign. Architectures and interfaces of data analysis need to be reconceived for the user.

> While becoming technologically literate and relevant, we resisted being driven by the technology. Instead, our strength and value continues in the humanization of technology.

Popular representations tend toward the dystopian: elimination of privacy, hacking, and dehumanization all seem hallmarks of popular representations of Big Data application. There is opportunity to harness Big Data for the use and application of individuals. With articulated benefits to end-users, Big Data application may be seen as less of a burden and a threat, and become more of a service and a personal benefit for which trading some privacy for access is a mutually agreed-upon exchange.

There is as yet no "killer app" for Big Data, no spreadsheet nor word processor. No desktop publishing, which was so important to establishing technical communication in the 1980s. And there is certainly no Internet of Big Data. Is that what's necessary? An Internet of Big Data? Certainly, there are opportunities for rearticulating Big Data analysis as a benefit for those producing the data itself, if we can just for a moment speculate more broadly.

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Are You Ready for Machine Translation?

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By ALAN HOUSER | *Fellow*

A PROFOUND CHANGE is underway in the translation industry. Organizations are changing the way they translate their content, using a technology called machine translation. Machine translation offers new ways to reach your global audience, in your customers' native languages. But knowing what machine translation can provide, and how to use it in your translation workflows, is critical.

Machine translation is not a magic solution. Organizations that attempt to deploy pure machine translation, without careful consideration of their translation requirements, business requirements, and successful machine translation workflows, are likely to be very disappointed. Let's consider how you can successfully deploy machine translation to increase your organization's global presence and reach your customers more efficiently and effectively.

What Is Machine Translation?

In the Global English Style Guide, John Kohl defines machine translation as "software that translates sentences from one language (such as English) into one or more other languages (such as French or Japanese)." Sounds good, right?

Machine translation has been around since the 1950s. Translation quality, however, has generally kept machine translation out of mainstream translation processes. But recent developments in machine translation technology, cloud-based services, and machine translation workflows have converged to bring machine translation into the mainstream.

Machine Translation in the Mainstream

Is the Universal Communicator of Star Trek a reality? Not quite, but almost. The ubiquity of smartphones and cloud computing has put machine translation capabilities in the hands of everybody. Consider the following recent developments:

- *Make Magazine* featured a do-it-yourself project for a spoken-language translator. The project is based on the $35 Raspberry Pi micro-computer, an open-source speech-recognition API, and Google's cloud-based translation service.
- The Google's Translate smartphone app accepts text, voice, and image input. For example, you can take a picture of a restaurant menu, and Google will provide a translation in the language of your choice. Google claims the app supports 90 languages, has 500 million monthly users, and delivers a billion translations a day.
- Microsoft recently announced Skype Translator, which provides real-time audio translation and text transcription of Skype conversations between English- and Spanish-speakers.
- Google, Microsoft (Bing), IBM (Watson), and others offer API-based services for organizations that wish to develop machine translation applications.

How Does It Work?

Implementers of machine translation software and systems use one of two approaches. Rules-based machine translation uses the rules of grammar, syntax, and meaning for each language to develop a translation.

Statistical machine translation performs translations by identifying the most likely translation for source content, one word or phrase at a time, to produce the most statistically valid translation. Statistical machine translation systems make this assessment after being "trained" with large volumes of previously translated content.

Both approaches have their strengths and limitations. Rules-based machine translation tends to work best with source content that is of high quality and consistency. However, rules-based machine translation may be ineffective with content from a highly specialized subject or domain, and robust rules may not exist for less popular language pairs.

Statistical machine translation can be highly effective with specialized subject matter, if a substantial amount of previously translated content exists. Organizations with large volumes of previously translated content and well-maintained translation memories may be good candidates for statistical machine translation.

What About Quality?

The promise of machine translation is enormous. Translation is expensive. Imagine that you can translate your organization's content immediately, automatically, and at trivial cost. That is possible, with one catch.

Machine translation quality is generally far lower than that of human translators. You have probably seen examples of laughable or even disastrous machine translations. Machine translation may not approach the quality of human translators for a long time, if ever. Any machine translation initiative will require ways to assess the quality of machine-translated output, and adjust the machine translation workflow accordingly.

If you work with machine translation, you will encounter the BLEU score for measuring machine translation quality. Simplistically, the BLEU score reflects:

- How many words are correctly translated into the target language?
- How many machine-translated words are in the correct order in the target language?

To evaluate the quality of a machine translation, you must have a human-generated translation as a reference. For this reason, machine translation is often most effective where a large body of previously translated content already exists, along with a large, well-maintained translation memory.

Achieving Quality Results

You can achieve high-quality results with machine translation, if you engage human translators in the process. In this increasingly popular workflow, human translators

post-edit machine translation output to bring it to a desired level of quality. Instead of translating from the original source language, a post-editor can start with a rough translation. When properly deployed, this can dramatically improve the efficiency of the human translator.

Translation professionals have been justifiably skeptical of machine translation post-editing. Original post-editing workflows often included arbitrary or unreasonable constraints on the post-editor (e.g., "change no more than three segments per paragraph") and compensated post-editors poorly compared to conventional translation workflows.

Newer post-editing workflows leverage an organization's translation memory; identifying accurate machine-translated segments, close matches, and unusable segments. Human translators "fix" the close matches and unusable segments based on the original source material, and are compensated for their efforts in the same way that they have always been. This provides for a familiar working environment for post-editors, fair compensation, and good translation results.

Consider Your Strategy

It's important to have a sound strategy for deploying machine translation. Your strategy may include:

- Human translators for highly visible marketing and website copy.
- Straight machine translation for technical support and customer-generated content (such as customer-support forums).
- Machine translation with human post-editing for technical documentation.

You may want to engage several different vendors. Assess quality carefully; you will find that machine translation quality can vary substantially for different language pairs.

Tips for Successful Deployment

Consider the following approach to successfully deploy machine translation:

- Assess your customer requirements. In many circumstances (social media, customer support forums), your customers may be thrilled to have translated content in their native languages, and may be surprisingly forgiving of subpar translation quality.
- Develop a machine translation strategy. This includes analyzing your content streams, assessing appropriate quality targets, developing translation workflows for each stream, and measuring the benefits of providing translated content.
- Measure your results and refine your processes. Machine translation workflows can be complex, especially when high-quality results are required. Be sure to have metrics to measure the efficiency of your processes, quality of results, and business benefits. Be prepared to refine your machine translation processes and workflows.

Selecting a Machine Translation Vendor

Machine translation technologies and workflows are rapidly evolving. Ask your vendor the following questions:

- How do they assess machine translation quality?
- How do they train their machine translation system with your content?
- How do they protect your training data? This is particularly important for hosted or cloud-based services.
- What is their rate structure for post-editing? Some vendors provide a discounted rate for post-editing machine translation output. Some vendors will identify "unusable" machine translation output, and re-translate only that portion using human translators at customary rates.
- What mechanisms does the vendor provide for improving translation quality?

Selecting, configuring, training, and maintaining machine translation systems and workflows is a complex task. If your current language service provider is not already doing so, consider engaging a vendor that specializes in machine translation.

Conclusion

The global translation market is growing, and customers are becoming more likely to expect content in their native languages. Although roles will remain for human translators, organizations require more efficient tools and workflows to successfully meet customer demand for localized content.

There is a substantial amount of fear and distrust of machine translation, as exists with any disruptive technology that can replace human effort. However, solutions are quickly emerging for overcoming issues with machine translation quality, and for effectively using machine translation along with human translators to meet the global demand for localized content.

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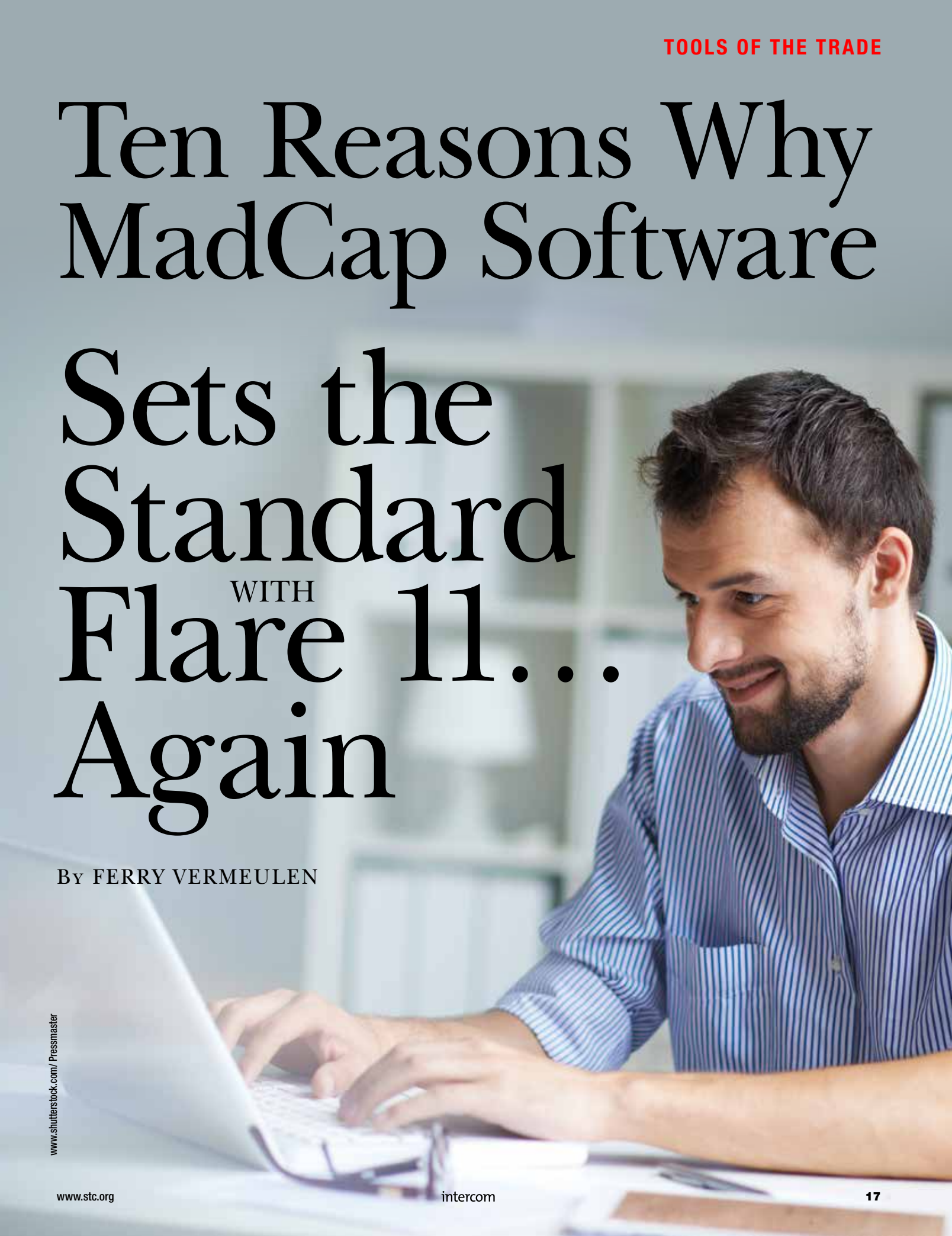
Ten Reasons Why MadCap Software Sets the Standard WITH Flare 11… Again

By FERRY VERMEULEN



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AS A TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION service business, we chiefly develop user manuals for our clients. Our primary focus is on generating high-quality content. Of course, to be competitive, we need to create the output in a fast and efficient way. That's why we use (and are an authorized reseller of) MadCap Software. As a brand advocate and ambassador, I was honored to be invited to the early beta test of the latest major updates and enhancements added to Flare 11. During my testing, I was pleased to discover that almost all these improvements are focused on both quality and efficiency. In this review, I provide a brief overview and discuss the enhancements which are most valuable to me.

1. Frameless Website Output for HTML5

Let's start with my favorite design enhancement: a new skin type that allows creation of HTML5 output with top navigation! This makes the online output look more like a traditional website and less like an online book (with the navigation pane on the left of your screen, the familiar tri-pane skin). This is a vast step toward a more dynamic Web-based format. With this output option, it will be much easier to convince our customers to create multi-channel output from the same content and deliver a better customer experience. In my opinion, there still is much to gain when it comes to user experience and usability. I am a big fan of the OverDrive case study (you can find the Overdrive webinar on the MadCap website), where they pushed Flare output to their own CMS to create a much more user-friendly environment—similar to what is now available out-of-the-box with Flare 11.

There are a few ways to create this new output with top navigation, but the easiest way is to use one of Flare's built-in HTML5 top navigation templates when creating a new project.

Pay some attention when you want to make the output responsive. With the traditional tri-pane skin, you can enable or disable responsive output on the Setup tab in the Skin Editor. But for top navigation skins, you will notice that the responsive output section is not included in the Skin Editor. However, there is an additional responsive output setting in the Target Editor for HTML5 that is available for both top navigation and tri-pane outputs. This setting lets you enable device width media queries for responsive output. Why this is different from the standard tri-pane process is unclear to me, but I guess it has something to do with the horizontal stretched top navigation.

2. Absolute Positioning, Z-Index, and Text Wrapping

Another of the other major design features is called "absolute positioning." I like absolute positioning because it makes it far easier to place elements anywhere you like and provides much more design freedom.

This new capability basically means that you can drag and drop elements (like images) anywhere in the content. You might recognize a similar concept from Microsoft

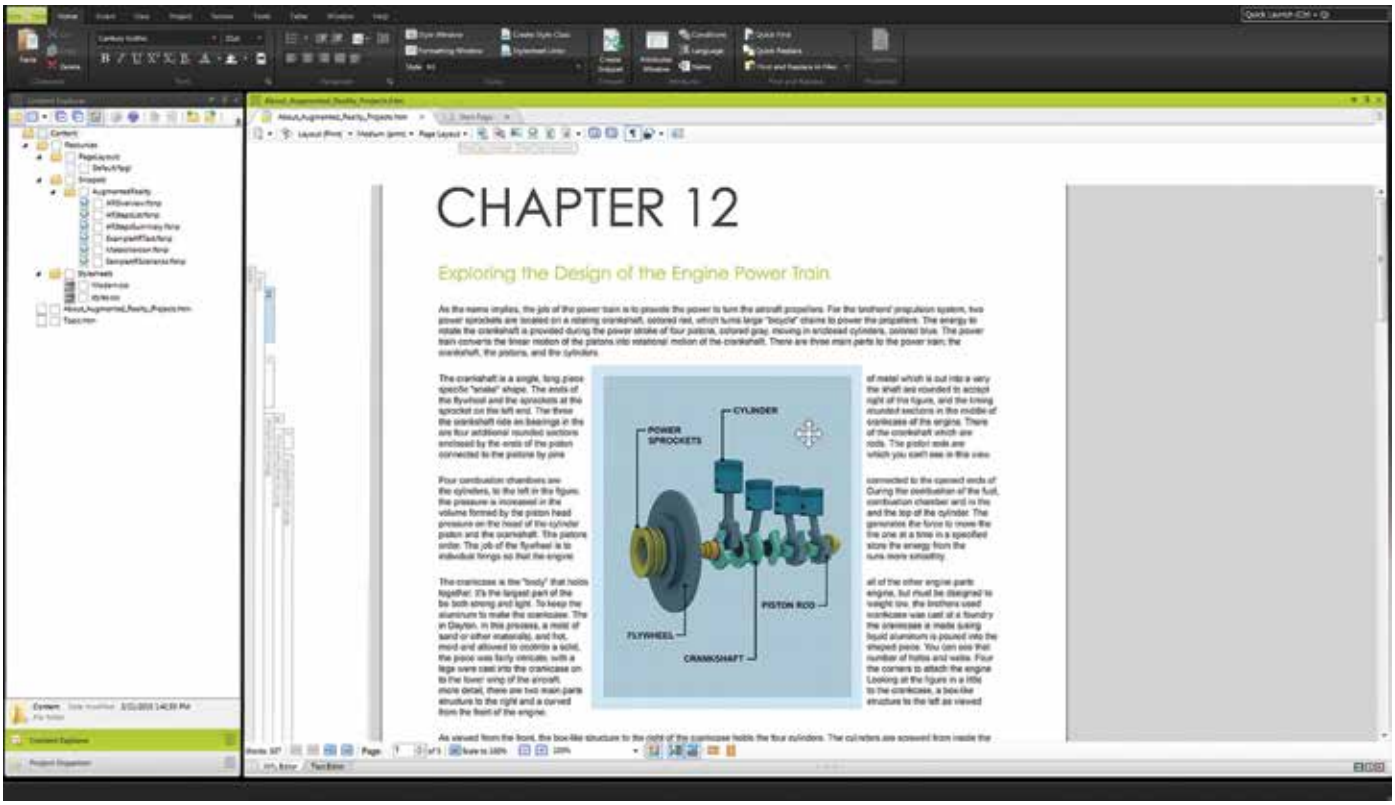

Figure 1. Control where an image, paragraph, text or other document element is placed in both print and Web content with absolute positioning, z-index, and text wrapping.

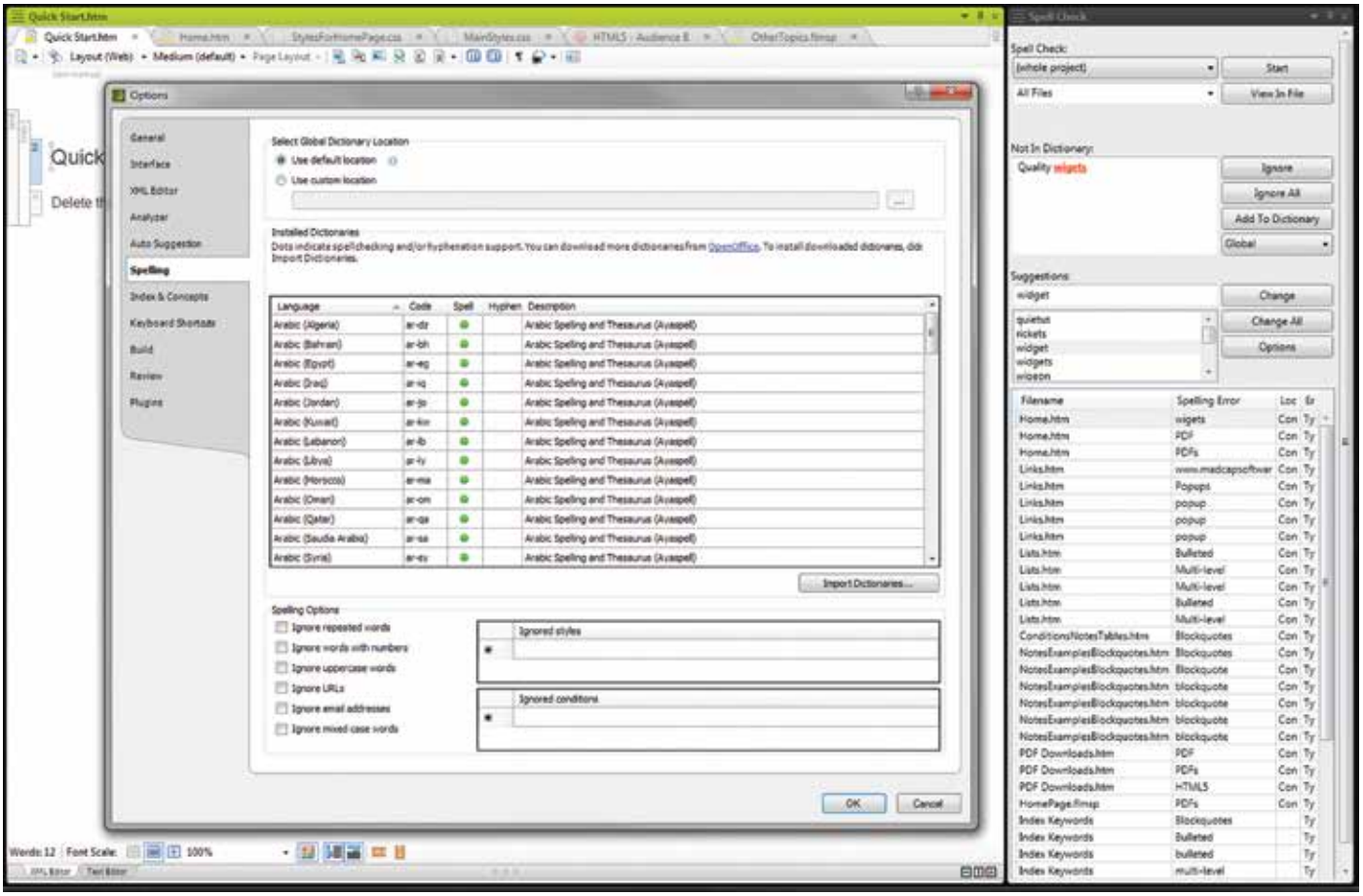

Figure 2. New global dictionary support allows mutiple Flare projects to share the same dictionary for spell checking.

Word where it is called text wrapping. To activate absolute positioning, you set the position to "absolute" via the stylesheet, or you can right-click on your image and select the text wrap option.

When right-clicking, you will also find that there are three primary ways (in addition to in line with text) to display absolutely positioned elements in relation to the other content:

- Square—wraps text around the absolutely positioned element on any or all sides. This feature is for PDF only. Other outputs will "float" the image with the text wrapping left or right.
- Behind Text—places the absolutely positioned element behind text.
- In Front of Text—places the absolutely positioned element in front of text.

I haven't tried elements other than images yet, but according to MadCap you can use absolute positioning for any kind of element, including div tags, paragraphs, and more. What I did try, however, is selecting an object that I just placed behind the text. There is a little trick for doing this: by triple clicking on the content where the absolutely positioned element is placed in, this will select that block of content. Then you can click once on the element to select it.

3. Dictionaries (Global) and Spell Check Enhancements

I just love the enhancements that have been made to dictionaries and the spell checking window. In addition to a little redesign, some new options have been added as well. In Flare 10 it was possible to look in your current document, the whole project, all open documents, or all documents in the same folder. With Flare 11 it is also possible to look in a content folder or to pick a folder.

Flare 11 spell check also makes it possible to not just scan topics, but also to scan snippets, TOCs, glossaries, or index keywords. And when a spelling has been corrected, it is possible to add it to a project dictionary or a global dictionary.

This brings me to another improvement: the option to create global dictionaries. In previous versions, Flare supported only custom dictionaries at a project level. This means that the dictionaries created were related to specific projects. A global dictionary can be opened in any project to use it for spell checking. This is very useful when you work with a team of tech writers and want to make sure you are all using the same spellings for certain terms.

The product dictionaries are located in the Advanced folder of the Project Organizer. A global dictionary is stored in your AppData folder by default. However, you

can store the global dictionary in any location using the Options dialog. You can also tell Flare to ignore certain types of words or circumstances during spell check.

The spell check process has also been improved. To start spell checking, select Tools>Spell Check Window from the ribbon and click the Start button. After starting spell check, all locations of the word which is not in the dictionary are displayed at the bottom of the Spell Check window. With this improvement you don't need to open multiple files anymore. This makes spell checking much easier than the old method! The dictionary and spell check enhancements have a major impact on content quality and efficiency.

4. Augmented Reality

I am always interested in the latest developments in the field of augmented reality (AR). About a year ago, I experimented with Metaio Creator a bit and during MadWorld 2014, MadCap lifted a little corner of the veil regarding their plans to integrate AR with Flare. I am thrilled to see that Flare 11 supports AR scenarios now. This is more evidence that my favorite authoring tool supplier responds to new developments, which I find very important.

Augmented reality (AR) describes a technology that blends digital content into our real world. Basically you tell the AR software to recognize an image, object, or location when scanned with a smartphone, tablet, or smart glasses. When recognized, the software projects digital content using your mobile or tablet device. The Metaio output is called an AR scenario.

In Flare, AR scenarios can be included in both print and online outputs. To do so, you first add the images you want to use for AR in your Flare project. The image then needs to be exported to Metaio Creator using Flare (see documentation). A link will be established between the Flare image and the corresponding AR scenario. Users of your content will then need to install the free Metaio Junaio app in order to scan the image and get the AR experience. Awesome!

Figure 3. Add augmented reality content to your documenation, such as 3D animation or other interactive content that can be triggered or accessed using a smartphone, tablet, or specialized eyewear.

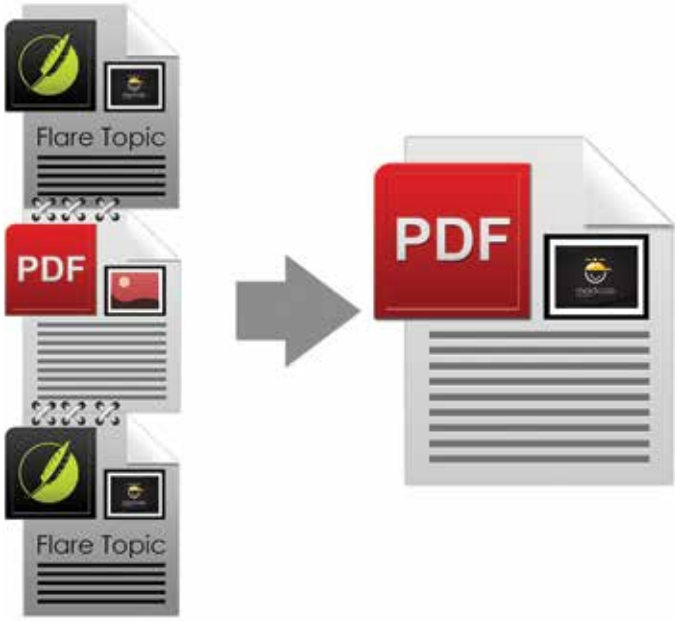

Figure 4. Stitch any number of PDF documents into a single file for easy distribution.

5. Target Background Builds

With Flare 11, you can now build multiple targets in the background, which is a massive time saver!

In previous versions, the only known way to build output was by opening a target and building it by clicking the Build button and waiting until the project was built. This option has been replaced. When you generate a target in the interface of Flare 11, it builds the output in the background via Madbuild.

The most noticeable aspect of this change is that, when you generate a target, the Build Progress dialog no longer opens. Instead, the Build window pane opens at the bottom of the workspace. One of the greatest benefits of this change is that you can continue working in your project while you generate one or more targets behind the scenes.

If you are concerned about Flare slowing down during builds, you may want to limit the number of targets that can be generated at the same time. You can set the maximum amount of targets in the Build tab of the Options dialog.

6. Doc-To-Help Import

This enhancement didn't come as a surprise to me, but I am amazed at how quickly MadCap implemented the Doc-To-Help import feature. MadCap's acquisition of Doc-to-Help was just announced in January and within months they've made it possible to import Doc-To-Help files into Flare!

I am not a Doc-To-Help user, but for those who are, to import a .d2h file you select File>New Project>Doc-To-Help Project from the ribbon. When importing you need to take some important things into account to make the conversion as smooth as possible. Flare Help gives a good overview of the steps to take.

7. Embedding YouTube and Vimeo Videos

I am familiar with this feature from our company's Web-CMS. If you store movies on YouTube or Vimeo, or use third-party movies from these providers in your content, you can now add these videos to Web-based outputs. There are two ways to insert YouTube and Vimeo movies:

- Embedding movies. By choosing Insert>Multimedia from the ribbon, the movie is embedded into the topic or snippet. In addition, it is possible to specify advanced settings, such as whether to automatically start the movie when it displays, and what kind of information to display on the movie.
- Linking to the movie. By choosing Insert>Hyperlink from the ribbon, you can add a link to the video. The user then needs to click the text link in order to open the movie. When you insert a YouTube or Vimeo link in your output, it will send you to the host website to play the movie rather than embedding the video.

8. PDF Stitching

Sometimes you accept doing things the way a tool makes you do them and you stop thinking about potential improvements. That's why I am thrilled that you can now stitch existing PDFs into your output by adding links to them in a table of contents (TOC). This functionality is supported in both .pdf output and all of the online targets. My personal experience is that in Europe, we still create print output for user manuals most frequently (compared to online output), simply because it is mandatory because of CE marking (European conformity assessment). Quite often our customers can provide us with appendices, such as a spare parts lists and P&IDs (piping and instrumentation diagrams). In previous versions we inserted PDFs as an image into a topic, sometimes even after converting it to a PNG or JPG, or we simply inserted empty appendices at the end of our TOC, to replace them later with a print of the PDF.

In Flare 11, you can now stitch a PDF into the Flare output by adding the finished PDF(s) to the Content Explorer in your project. The easiest way to do this is to open Windows, copy the PDFs, and paste them into the Content subfolder of your project. In Flare you then open a TOC file and you drag the PDF to the TOC from the Content Explorer. When generating your target, the PDF appears in your output. The stitched PDF pages will be inserted at the location represented by the entry in the TOC. Be aware, if you insert a finished PDF in the middle of topic entries in the TOC, the topics after the inserted PDF will increment page numbers accordingly.

9. Pinning Enhancements

I found two pinning enhancements in Flare 11: pinning your favorite fonts and pinning favorite projects.

Pinning fonts can be done in the Font selection list box. Now you can pin both your favorite fonts and font sets and move them to the top of the font list for quick access at any time. This makes them easier to find later. Also the Font Properties dialog has been rearranged to allow for more space for a larger font selection list box. Expandable groups for recently used fonts, pinned fonts, defined font sets, and all system fonts have been added. One way to access the Font Properties dialog is by clicking [image] in the Fonts section of the ribbon.

From the Start Page you can now also pin your favorite projects to keep them displayed at the top of the list. To pin a project, hover over any recent project and click the little pin. It will then be moved to the top of the list. To unpin a project, just click the pin again and it will be moved back to the bottom section of the list.

10. Search Enhancements

Will the Flare algorithm become just as smart as Google's search? The search result algorithm has been significantly updated in Flare 11 in order to provide more accurate and intuitive search result in the Web-based outputs. Flare also updated the way search results are ranked, so you can optimize your content based on where keywords are located in a topic. Flare ranks topics based on where keywords appear in a topic. These rankings are as follows:

1. Title tags
2. Heading 1
3. Heading 2 or abstract text (i.e., meta description)
4. Heading 3
5. Heading 4 or index keywords
6. Heading 5 or glossary terms
7. Heading 6 or keywords in body text

Figure 5. The new and improved search algorithm provides better Google-style search results for end users.

There are quite a few improvements regarding the HTML5 search; the Flare search engine now ranks HTML5 search results using two factors: relevance and importance. Relevance is determined by the number of times the search term appears in a topic and where it appears in the topic, such as in headings, index markers, or tags. Importance is determined by the number of links to a topic in the output. A topic that is linked to/from several other topics is ranked higher in importance than a topic that is only linked to/from one other topic. It is generally assumed that the Google algorithm works similarly (although semantics have become more important for Google recently).

Using a combination of relevance and importance gives you the most accurate results. You can choose to turn off importance and search using only relevance. This is not recommended unless you have one topic that is linked to so many times that it would skew your search results.

If you want to toggle importance on or off, you need to open an HTML5 target. Then select Include Importance on the Advanced tab of the Target Editor.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that we use Flare in our business on a daily basis, I am always excited to see a new release. I believe Flare 11 boasts some major new features and improvements aimed at improving quality (both design and content) and user efficiency. Additionally, new technology enhancements, such as augmented realty, give me great confidence that MadCap Software makes every effort to give technical writers and content developers the best possible tool in the market. MadCap Software proves to be a leader and is eager to push the envelope to look well beyond the status quo. Once again, MadCap sets the new industry standard with Flare 11.

FERRY VERMEULEN, MSC, *is founder of Manualise, a company that develops, improves, and maintains instructions for use. Manualise has a strong focus on usability and meeting all legal requirements. Customers include the Bosch-group, Schneider-Electric, Skil, Electrolux, and AkzoNobel.*

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STC Society for Technical Communication

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ASD Simplified Technical English (STE) term checker

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- Approved as a noun
- Approved as an adjective
- Approved as a noun and as an adjective.

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* *Fluid* is approved as a noun only, unlike *liquid*, which is approved as a noun and as an adjective.

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STC Summit 2015: Mind, Spirit, Connection

BY CHRIS HESTER | *Fellow and Conference Chair*

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, my parents would ship me off to summer camp, and year after year, the theme was the same: have fun, learn new skills or strengthen existing ones, and above all else, connect with new and familiar friends. This year's Summit in particular is exciting to me because June in Columbus feels like returning to camp: it's a time to get away and renew our minds, spirits, and connections.

Experiences for the Mind

The full Summit program is a five-day event, starting with pre-conference workshops on Saturday and Sunday, followed by education sessions Monday through Wednesday, and both opening and closing keynote speakers. Several changes this year address requests to increase the number of hands-on workshops, tools and technology topics, and advanced-level sessions.

Pre-conference workshops focus on topics of current interest to technical communication professionals. Take a deep dive into a two-day certificate class on Implementing Content Strategy, Technical Editing Fundamentals, or Trends in International Technical Communication. Jump into the one-day workshop on mobile app development, or a half-day session on information architecture, API documentation, project management, and promoting yourself and your business.

Over 70 sessions make up the **Summit's education program**, which starts on Monday morning. Three core tracks run the full length of the Summit. Complementing the core tracks are specialty tracks that support targeted interests. These tracks run a full day.

Lightning talks are back, and new this year will be the Tech Comm Throwdown—a debate the likes of which you haven't seen at the Summit before!

Speakers and Community for the Spirit

Storytelling is a powerful communication tool, and it's integral to our role as we develop content that informs, instructs, and persuades. Our Summit opens on Sunday evening with keynote speaker Nancy Duarte, who will lead us through how stories help us engage with each other and our audience to build lasting relationships. Wednesday morning, keynote Denise Jacobs will send us off with a message on how to continue learning and feeling renewed, long after the Summit has ended.

Columbus itself has a busy, thriving design and tech-oriented community that offers plenty to do outside of the hotel and conference center, so plan on getting out and about. We are within walking distance of North Market, a public market with offerings from local artists, jewelers, and merchants. Self-guided art tours and bike rentals are options for those who want to explore on their own. Nightly outings to local eateries, music venues, and the German Village will provide occasions to relax after a full day of Summit sessions (and if you're so inclined, the German Village is home to a 32-room used bookstore).

Opportunities for Connection

Networking isn't limited to breaks or after-hour activities: check out the Expo Hall's grand opening on Sunday evening after the keynote session. Then return when the Expo Hall hosts the Speed Networking on Monday and Communities Reception on Tuesday, providing many opportunities to mix and mingle. The Expo Hall will be home to breaks, raffle prize drawings, and more, so be sure to visit often.

The full program guide is available on *lanyrd.com/2015/stc15*. Here you can view the schedule, sessions, speakers, and attendees (remember to indicate that you're joining us). You can also use Lanyrd to build a personal schedule of sessions you want to attend or send messages to attendees you want to meet. Follow *@stc_summit* on Twitter for Summit updates.

For more information about STC's 2015 Summit, visit the Summit's website, *summit.stc.org*, and register soon. See you in Columbus!

Core Track	Example Topics
Writing and Communication	content marketing, content strategy, editing, information architecture, editing, plain language, writing
Art, Design, and Visual Communication	Information graphics, mind mapping, responsive design, user experience, wireframing
Tools and Technology	CSS and HTML5, DITA, ePub, git, machine translation, markup, open source tools, web services

Specialty Track	Example Topics
API Documentation	developer documentation, coding, getting started with API documentation, REST, SDK
Consulting and Small Business	Career choices, fees, proposals, site visits
Leadership and Management	DocOps, intellectual property, leadership skills, new managers, technical presentation
Training and Research	instructional design, online education, technical editing competencies

STC Publishes 2014 Year in Review

BY CHRIS LYONS | *CEO* and
KIT BROWN-HOEKSTRA | *STC President*

THE YEAR 2014 was a successful one for many reasons. It was a year of improvement in jobs and economies around the world, particularly in the United States. Correspondingly, the number of technical communicators working increased and we saw a greater number of job postings on the STC Job Board. STC's staff and volunteers were hard at work as well. Much like the world, 2014 was a year of increasing momentum for the Society for Technical Communication and its members.

For the first time since the recession, STC's membership grew, albeit slightly. This was a significant achievement after many years of decline. We worked to increase the value of membership in 2014 by adding a print copy of *Intercom* to Gold memberships and initiating a quarterly series of free webinars for members of Chapters and SIGs. Additionally, the Technical Communication Summit held in May in Phoenix, Arizona, was a big success with strong attendance and high satisfaction ratings reported by attendees. We debuted a new Virtual Track in Phoenix and extended the live audience for our Summit sessions across the United States and internationally. Conversations begun at the Summit often develop into new member offerings, and this year, we launched a SIG focused on Agile software development. Most significantly, STC began work on re-opening the Professional Certification program.

Internally, STC initiated broad changes to its infrastructure and staffing. We began work on improving the STC online enterprise. Our goal is to leverage the collective footprint of dozens of Chapter and SIG websites to share content, drive advertising, and at the same time decrease the maintenance effort. We began offering free hosting to all Chapters and SIGs and standardized the sites as much as possible via WordPress. And finally, but perhaps most importantly, we did a great job managing our 2014 budget, resulting in the first operating surplus STC has had in many years.

The 2014 annual report reviews the past year and highlights the actions taken in 2014 to strengthen the Society, both in terms of the value it provides its members and its sustainability as a business. It informs members of performance in major program areas, significant changes, and new initiatives. We hope all STC members and volunteers will share in these accomplishments and continue their generous support.

To read the entire 2014 Year in Review, visit *www.stc.org/images/stories/pdf/stc2014yearinreview.pdf.*

Discover the Art and Soul of Columbus

BY ANNIE KERR

AS YOU STEP OUT of the Convention Center, you'll find yourself on the edge of what is fondly known as the "Art and Soul" of Columbus. The Short North is a cacophony of what makes life enjoyable—good food, good drink, and interesting art. It's a walkable section of Columbus to explore (*www.shortnorth.org/sites/default/files/convention_center_walking_map.pdf*) for an afternoon or evening, but beware that it's not easy to leave!

Expect to be lured in by the sights of art spilling into the streets in the form of outdoor murals (*www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2014/02/27/murals-murals-on-the-walls-for-all.html*) that range from whimsical to thoughtful, and sculptures placed in micro-parks to be discovered. Once drawn in, you'll find a number of galleries dotting the landscape specializing in everything from high-end contemporary art found at the Wexner Center for the Arts (*wexarts.org*), to Paul Palnik's

www.shutterstock.com/ aceshot1

Wexner Center for the Arts

(*www.paulpalnik.com/home*) cartoon gallery. Of particular interest is Lumos (*www.lumoscolumbus.com*), a tech-focused art gallery and incubator that showcases interactive tech art, science-based fine art, digital print, and interactive robotic art.

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The Short North area of Columbus is prime attraction for shopping and dining.

If great music in a bohemian atmosphere is what you're after, stay the weekend and follow the Short North crowd to Comfest (*www.comfest.com*), the nation's largest volunteer-run festival being held June 26–28. The Community Festival has remained true to its grass roots since 1972, embracing diversity and activism, but has also gained a reputation as host to musical genres that run the gamut from jazz to hip hop. Entertainment is live from noon to 10:00 PM and includes demonstrations, crafts, live performances, and workshops. The event itself is free but beverage and food cannot be brought into the park. Food and drinks can be purchased from a number of street vendors and beverage trucks. While a fun and eclectic place for families during the day, you can expect an adult atmosphere toward dusk.

While street fair food is its own delicacy of sorts, don't miss the opportunity to dine at least a couple of times in the Short North during your visit. From breakfast to late-night dining, there's no shortage of excellent choices in every price range. Add to your international culinary experiences at the North Market (*www.northmarket.com*)for lunch, and discover the Short North for the foodie paradise(*www.shortnorth.org/dining*) it really is.

If you want to consolidate your experience in the Short North but still get the feel and flavor, you won't do better than by signing up for the Short North Food Tour and Walking Tour (*columbusfoodadventures.com/2011/tour/short-north-food-tour*), hosted by Columbus's own premiere foodie blogger Bethia Woolf. Be sure to purchase tickets in advance.

After dark, the area awakens with 17 lighted arches beckoning you into the trend-setting and edgy atmosphere that the Short North is known for. There's a perceptible feel of adventure in the air as you join others seeking out their favorite places to be seen, trying on a new venue, or moving from place to place. North High Brewery (*www.northhighbrewing.com*) and Barley's Brewing Company (*www.barleysbrewing.com*) are local breweries that bookend the Short North District, but be sure to check out Bodega's (*www.columbusbodega.com*) if craft beer is your thing. With a selection of over 50 craft beers on draft and over 100 bottles, it's a must see for any hophead.

Camelot Cellars (*camelotcellars.com*) is a wine boutique that any aficionado will appreciate. Try one of their award-winning wines for an after-dinner cocktail or sign up for a tour of the facilities. Not be forgotten, Middle West Spirits' (*middlewestspirits.com*) artisan vodka and whiskey can be discovered on one of their $15 Friday night public tours of its 10,000 square foot distillery.

Off-street, meter, and restaurant parking is available but crowded on the weekends. If you're staying nearby, walking is definitely your best option and besides, after all that gastronomic goodness, you might be ready to burn off a few calories. i

Share Yourself with *Intercom* Readers

WE'RE LOOKING FOR MEMBERS to contribute a first-person column for a future issue of *Intercom*. The magazine has a trio of member-focused columns: My Job (your day-to-day work), Off Hours (discussing your hobby or side gig), and Looking Back. My Job takes a look at the day-to-day work of an STC member and what makes the job interesting, fun, or unique. Off Hours is a look at the side jobs and hobbies our members have. And Looking Back focuses on senior members providing perspective earned throughout their career. Would you like to share your story with *Intercom* readers? Email Marisa Seitz, *marisa.seitz@stc.org*, for more information, samples, and to volunteer! i

The REACH Approach to Developing Online Materials for International Audiences

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BY KIRK ST.AMANT | *Fellow*

WITH SOME THREE BILLION persons online globally, the world seems smaller than ever (Internet Usage Statistics, 2014). For technical communicators, the challenge becomes developing and delivering Web-based content to this international audience. But where to begin and how to proceed? One mechanism that can help is the REACH approach to understanding international online contexts.

REACH stands for

- Receive
- Economics
- Access
- Catch
- Hold

Each letter represents an area to consider when developing online materials for international audiences. The idea is to answer key questions associated with how individuals in other nations access and use Web-based materials. The approach works as follows.

R – Receive

Key question: *Can individuals receive the information you wish to share online?*

While global connections to the Internet are increasing, that growth is not uniform. In certain nations (e.g., Denmark) almost everyone seems to be online. In other cases (e.g., Cuba), the number of online connections remains limited or is confined to certain areas in a given nation. As a result, technical communicators might wish to consider approaches—other than online ones—to delivering information to individuals in regions with limited online access. One resource that can help when researching this topic is Internet World Stats (*www.internetworldstats.com*), which provides relatively recent counts of the number of individuals connected to the

This column examines different aspects of technical communication in global contexts. Email the editor at *STAMANTK@ecu.edu.*

Internet on a continent-by-continent and nation-by-nation basis.

E – Economics

Key question: *Can the intended audience afford the product or service for which you are developing online content?*

All products have an associated cost. Yet how expensive that cost is depends on the income of consumers. For example, a software package that costs $100 might seem reasonably priced in Norway (where the average annual income is roughly $55,400), but would be considered exorbitantly expensive to many consumers in Madagascar (where the average annual income is approximately $1,000). Such factors can be important when considering what online content to develop for different regions based on the kinds of products—as related to cost—individuals might be purchasing (or purchasing in volume). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s online resource *The World Factbook* (*www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook*) can help with this item by providing data on average annual incomes (in U.S. dollars) in specific nations. (This information can be found under the Economy tab for each entry/nation and in the section "GDP per capita – (PPP):".)

A – Access

Key question: *What technologies do individuals use to access online information?*

Access is about the technologies individuals use to interact online. For example, with almost 1.4 billion monthly users worldwide, Facebook seems almost ubiquitous (Company Info., 2015), but it's not. In fact, the 640 million+ persons online in the People's Republic of China have almost no access to Facebook (China, 2014; Young, 2014). Instead, many individuals turn to other media—such as the instant messaging platform QQ and social media platforms such as Qzone, Weixin (WeChat), and Sina Weibo—for gleaning and exchanging information. By knowing what media the users in a given nation use to access online information, technical communicators can develop content for distribution through those venues. Initial resources for learning about such trends include online magazines like *SocialMediaToday* (*www.socialmediatoday.com/*) that report on international online markets and on information communication technologies (ICTs) in global contexts.

C – Catch

Key question: *What design features will attract the attention of the intended audience?*

Catch is about attention. The visual features or design factors that catch an individual's attention can vary from nation to nation and culture to culture. (Compare, for example, the layout, design, and visuals Pepsi uses on its websites for Argentina [*www.pepsi.com/es-ar/d*] and Russia [*www.pepsi.com/ru-ru/d*].) In this case, technical communicators need to consider what visual features they can re-use with audiences from other cultures and when new visuals need to be created. Technical communicators also need to consider how to create online materials to be flexible enough that the design of interfaces can be easily adapted to meet the "catch" expectations of other cultural groups. Resources for gaining an initial understanding of cultural expectations and visual design include "Designing for an International Audience" (*www.artandlogic.com/blog/2013/09/designing-for-an-international-audience*) and "Color and Culture: Design for an International Audience" (*www.designcontest.com/blog/color-and-culture-design-for-an-international-audience*).

H – Hold

Key question: *What kind of content do users expect to find online?*

Hold involves the kind of information that appears in online materials. If the information/content you provide meets what users are looking for, it will hold their attention, and they will likely keep reading or using it. Cultures, however, might expect different online content/information on given products (e.g., more vs. less information on product specifications). In this case, collecting information directly from users can be invaluable. Doing so could involve working closely with translators and localizers to determine what information needs to be created (or adapted) for users from other cultures. Technical communicators could also interview persons from a particular culture to gain insights on these content expectations. The key is to collect information as directly as possible from members of the related culture. While the most complex part of the REACH approach, this final step can be crucial to engaging effectively with international audiences online.

Final Thoughts

While technology makes it easier to connect to persons around the world, effectively interacting with them involves addressing certain factors. Doing so is no easy task, but the REACH approach can provide a framework to guide this process. By better understanding the five areas associated with REACH, technical communicators can gain the insights needed to create more effective, online materials for users around the globe.

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An Interview with Philip Wisniewski on Content Engineering

BY SCOTT ABEL | *Senior Member*

FOR OVER 20 YEARS, Philip Wisniewski has developed and managed strategic relationships with premier brands to deliver content-centric digital marketing and Web development initiatives. Applying a mix of digital strategy, client service, and business acumen, Philip can often be found evangelizing the promise of one-to-one interactive relationships between brands and their audiences, enabled through a foundation of software development and content engineering. He has driven business impact for such notable brands as Aetna, AIG, Boost Mobile, Equinox, Ernst & Young, Gillette, Humana, Kaspersky Lab, MetLife, Nikon, T Rowe Price, Time, and TracFone Wireless. In this edition of Meet the Change Agents, Scott Abel interviews Philip on content engineering.

Content is king, but only if we manage to get the right piece of content to the right person, when, where, and how they need it. Philip Wisniewski has spent the better part of the past decade helping organizations choreograph the smooth flow of content through various computing systems. Wisniewski believes, as do I, that a new breed of content professional—the content engineer—is needed to help us solve the content challenges we face today and into the future.

Scott Abel: Philip, let's start with a definition. What is content engineering?

Philip Wisniewski: In its simplest form, content engineering is the discipline of applying an engineering lens to content and a content lens to engineering. In *The Language of Content Strategy*, Joe Gollner does a very nice job of adding some details around this core principle.

Indeed, as just about every brand, and the many functions within those organizations, race to produce content as a means to service, sell and engage their customers, doing so at scale, across channels, efficiently and programmatically is proving to be very challenging.

Add to the mix the massive proliferation of tools and technologies that are in some way involved or touching content, and it is easy to quickly get overwhelmed and lose control.

In the digital age, change happens quickly. This column features interviews with the movers and shakers—the folks behind new ideas, standards, methods, products, and amazing technologies that are changing the way we live and interact in our modern world. Got questions, suggestions, or feedback? Email them to *scottabel@mac.com*.

Content engineering, from my perspective, allows us to connect these often disparate systems with a single content thread.

SA: Why do we need content engineering?

PW: As humans, we thirst for knowledge and emotional connections. That's been the case for thousands of years. In the digital age, everything we produce is boiled down to 1's and 0's, so those points of engagement are becoming blogs, PDFs, YouTube video's, podcasts, pins, posts, shares, and tweets, etc. For that content to work in a digital world, we need to apply engineering principles.

SA: What are some of the main challenges content engineering can help technical communication professionals solve?

PW: Let's imagine you are producing a specification document for a product your company manufactures. The specs have a dozen or more categories with accompanying diagrams. Years ago, you would create one large electronic file via some word processing software, generate a TOC based on the spec categories, and embed the images. Rinse and repeat for each language, print, bind, and shelve. We spent a lot of manual labor on maintaining those specs. Today, that same spec probably has a much shorter lifespan, meaning we are compelled to keep it current, because it's much easier to do so. If we peel that back, maintenance includes things like translations. Leveraging certain aspects of content engineering, we should only need to translate the section of the spec that has been updated, rather than the whole document—that saves time and money. Another challenge for tech pub professionals is around delivery. We moved from one channel (printed spec) to dozens, so now that content should be available via a PDF on a website, the call center, an online forum, and via site search, where only the applicable category you search for appears in the result. Content engineering provides the structure, tools, and processes for those new channels leverage that spec.

SA: Of course, content engineering is not limited to technical communication solutions. Can you provide an example of two from other disciplines?

PW: Sure, the area where we see the most connection to content engineering is in marketing, where the value of content is well understood. Marketers face the challenge, with all the content that is being produced, of how to stand out from content "noise." Personalization—being able to target a message to a specific segment, or even individual, based on what we know about them—will do a better job of breaking through the content clutter.

Personalization of content requires three elements: 1) content components that can be modified; 2) metadata for that content that describes the content, its ideal usage, and the target audience; and 3) the data/context that we key off of to connect the content to the audience.

Content engineering considers all of the complexities around personalization, connects different systems and data, and allows for the maintenance of very granular metadata. We are creating, enriching, managing, and publishing content programmatically at a massive scale in real time. This would not be possible without content engineering.

SA: Exceptional content experiences can have a positive impact on a brand. Of course, the reverse is true—bad experiences can negatively impact the brand, damage loyalty, and decrease revenue. How can content engineering help us create exceptional customer experiences with content? Can you provide some examples?

PW: We've already noted two examples, translation and personalization—both impact customer experiences. Another one is the notion of integration or unification of systems that each manage different aspects of an experience. Take commerce and content management systems, for example. Each may be managed by different corporate functions (marketing vs. eBusiness), and each may provide different types of content within an overall buying experience. Content engineering allows for both the commerce platform and the content management system (CMS) to deliver a seamless, content-rich experience that does not take away from the engagement, research, consideration, and purchase process. A Web "page" is really a hybrid of content and functions served up by many systems, and content engineering enables those pages to render as a unified, engaging experience.

Another great example is mobile. Your users won't return to a Web page if it doesn't load properly on their mobile device. Content engineering includes a focus on the tools and techniques required to optimize and adapt content, assets, and experiences for the vast variety of mobile devices. For mobile accessible sites, image size, page speed, and other factors can significantly impact usability and the overall experience.

SA: Operational efficiency is key in the ultra-competitive, content-driven world in which we live. Brands that waste time and money using outdated and time-consuming processes miss opportunities to innovate. How can content engineering help us become lean, mean, content-producing factories?

PW: Brands are now starting to realize the complexity of creating, curating, transforming, enriching, publishing, and syndicating content. No one tool can do it all, and many tools that are part of the content lifecycle overlap others with features and functions. Content engineers can help brand, determine the best technology or tool for each stage of the lifecycle, across

each channel, and streamline the associated workflows and processes. If we remove the challenge of technical complexity and how to manage the audience touch points across channels, we can allow innovation of the content itself. The power of the story and content will differentiate winning brands from the has-beens.

SA: What improvements can content engineering help provide that may not be obvious to people who don't work in the content engineering trenches?

PW: We've covered a number of improvements. To keep it simple, I like to say that content engineering will help your content be fast, flexible, and findable, or risk the fourth "f," failure.

SA: Some technical communicators want to expand their skill sets and branch out into other roles. Usually these new roles require a slightly different skill set. What skills do content engineers need to be successful?

PW: Content engineering is an eclectic mix of skills applied in a cohesive and structured approach. Much like the recently cited and mythical "marketing technologist," which is as rare as a unicorn, few individuals possess all the skills under the content engineering umbrella. Content engineering includes skills and expertise in systems integration, enterprise architecture, content strategy, content modeling and taxonomies, content management, data management, user interface development, user experience design, software engineering, and technology/business strategy.

SA: Skills are important, but what characteristics do you look for in prospective content engineers?

PW: One of the most important characteristics is collaboration. Since so many skills are important, we find ourselves often with a small team of experts working in partnership to solve a particular challenge. Collaboration drives innovation. Other characteristics include persuasion and executive presence, since these initiatives require budgets and support across the organization. Organizational silos are one of the biggest obstacles in the way of effectively applying content engineering.

SA: If you could provide one piece of advice for technical communication professionals who want to expand their careers into the content engineering discipline, what would that be?

PW: Don't underestimate how applicable your skills may be. Find peers in your organization who share a common vision, formulate work groups, and don't be afraid to bring your ideas and capabilities to other departments, especially marketing and IT. Both are desperate to augment traditional skill sets.

SA: If our readers would like to know more about content engineering, what resources for additional learning do you recommend?

PW: Google, the Intelligent Content Conference, Information Development World, and The Content Wrangler will be publishing a book on content engineering later this year.

SA: Thanks for sharing your expertise with our readers. I really appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to help us understand the basics of content engineering.

PW: You are very welcome, Scott. Thank you for the opportunity to spread the word and share my excitement about the content engineering discipline.

Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 18 March
The **Association of Teachers of Technical Writing** will hold its annual conference in Tampa, FL. The theme is "Exploring the Value of Technical Communication." For more information, contact:
ATTW
meloncon@tek-ritr.com
www.attw.org/conference

2 27–28 March
The **STC New England Chapter** will hold its conference Interchange 2015 at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell Campus Inn and Conference Center in Lowell, MA. For more information contact:
interchange@stcnewengland.org
www.stcnewengland.org/page-1750761

3 28 March
The **STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter** will hold its annual Mid-Atlantic TechComm Conference at the Giant Conference Center in Willow Grove, PA. For more information, visit:
www.stcpmc.org/conference

4 16-19 April
The **Association of Independent Information Professionals** will hold its annual conference in Irvine, CA. For more information, contact:
AIIP
+1 (225) 408-4400
office@aiip.org
www.aiip.org/Conference

5 24–29 April
The **International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)** will hold its Performance Improvement Conference at the Hyatt Regency in San Antonio, TX. For more information, contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2015

6 30 April–1 May
The **American Society for Indexing (ASI)** will be holding its annual conference in Seattle, WA. For more information, contact:
ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/conference-2015/

7 21–24 June
The **Society for Technical Communication** hosts the Technical Communication Summit in Columbus, OH. For more information, contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org

* STC-related event

Punched by Minimalism

BY OLIVIER BRICAUD | *Member*

I AM ALWAYS reticent to share my off-hours activities with my colleagues and professional acquaintances. It is nothing illegal or shameful, mind you, but the look of confusion and misunderstanding I have gotten at times is deterrent enough.

What do I do once I shed my technical writer's suit? I get punched, I get kicked, I get chocked, I get threatened by a wide range of weapons, and I fight back.

I am a level 5 Krav Maga practitioner. Krav Maga is a violent and dirty-fighting, hand-combat self-defense system—if you have never heard of Krav Maga, think Liam Neeson in *Taken*. Its violent efficiency has made it the combat system of choice for a multitude of law enforcement agencies and Special Forces units worldwide (Israeli Defense Forces, FBI, LAPD…). In the U.S., civilians can learn to defend against a variety of real-life, unarmed and armed attacks through a five-level curriculum starting at level 1.

So what does this have to do with technical writing, you might ask? That was also the question I was pondering when thinking about writing this column. And then I had my Eureka moment: Krav Maga is to martial arts what minimalism is to writing!

Both minimalism and Krav Maga are driven by principles. Bernard Aschwanden (STC's incoming president) defines the minimalism principles as follow:

- Choose an action-oriented approach
- Anchor the tool in the task domain
- Support error recognition and recovery
- Support readers to do, study, and locate

Let's see how Krav Maga fares against these governing principles.

Choose an action-oriented approach. Minimalism principles dictate addressing real tasks that users want to perform and providing an immediate opportunity to act, whereas Krav Maga advocates counter-attacking immediately after the initial threat has been addressed, or simultaneously, if possible. These two principles sound rather similar in empowering users/practitioners to act immediately with no delay—all in the name of efficiency.

Anchor the tool in the task domain. One of the tenets of minimalism is to focus on achieving real goals and completing real work rather than describing the features. In other words, we need to provide users with down-to-earth instructions that are necessary to perform a task, nothing less, nothing more. In Krav Maga, there are no somersaults or beautifully elaborate techniques. Our most reliable, most used, and most loved weapon is a kick to the groin, beautiful in its simplicity and efficacy. Krav Maga and minimalism strip down hand-to-hand combat and writing, to the bare minimum to ensure maximum efficiency.

Sparing session at the end of a grueling eight-hour Krav Maga belt test (Bricaud in red shorts).

Support error recognition and recovery. Minimalistic writing must provide error information that supports detection, diagnosis, and recovery. When dealing with self-defense situations, errors might have dramatic, if not fatal, effects. Krav Maga preaches to always train from a situation of disadvantage and encourages committing errors in the safety of the training room where they can be corrected. This method of training ensures that if a mistake or an unexpected event happens in the heat of the moment, the practitioner is not flustered and confused but can successfully recover from it.

Support readers to do, study, and locate. Minimalism is about providing the right information at the right time. For Krav Maga, providing the right information at the right time means delivering techniques that address actual and current threats. Krav Maga is an open system; techniques that are not relevant anymore are made obsolete to leave room for techniques that address threats that are becoming more common.

Now I have my answer when a colleague asks me what I do after work: "Same thing as I do at work. I apply minimalism." i

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